STATEMENT OF

THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

AND THE

TEXAS FARM BUREAU

TO THE

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

REGARDING S. 212

Presented by

Lloyd Arthur

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Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Water and Power Subcommittee, my name is Lloyd Arthur. I am a cotton farmer from Ralls, Texas, and operate 3781 acres of farmland in that area. I irrigate my cotton and grain sorghum from the High Plains Aquifer, and the aquifer is essential to my livelihood. I also currently serve as the Vice-President of the Texas Farm Bureau. I testify before you on behalf of the American Farm Bureau Federation and the Texas Farm Bureau in opposition to S. 212 and the direct and indirect impacts of such legislation.

The High Plains Aquifer is an open aquifer system containing some 3.3 billion acre-feet of water. The average water table thickness is 300 feet. The overlying land is some of the most fertile and productive agricultural land in the United States. Farmers and ranchers like myself have utilized water resources through irrigation to produce an abundance of crops and products that beneficially add to local and state economies and help feed America and the world. While agriculture is often pointed to as the reason for water table declines in some areas of the High Plains Aquifer, the fact is that developing irrigation technology continues to make American agriculture the most efficient groundwater user in the world.

All of us in the Texas panhandle are aware of the importance of the High Plains Aquifer on our local economy and on the economy of the state of Texas. Thirty-five percent of Texas' agribusiness is generated in the forty-one counties that overlay the aquifer from Lubbock to Amarillo. The panhandle area produces 50 percent of the state's cotton crop. This area's agricultural economic impact is critical to the state of Texas. The same can be said for agriculture's economic impact in all of the states that overlie the High Plains Aquifer.

Overall, the citizens of Texas have done a tremendous job of finding and using ways to conserve the water of the High Plains Aquifer. Ten years ago my farming operation was one hundred percent conventional furrow irrigation, which is about 60 percent water efficient. Over time, I have modified my operation from no Center Pivot Irrigation systems to nine. These pivot systems, using the Low Energy Precision Application (LEPA) technology, are estimated to be about ninety five percent efficient. Due to these conservation methods, I have reduced the amount of acres I irrigate from the aquifer by eighteen percent over the past ten years. In reducing the acres irrigated, I have reduced the usage of water to those acres and have not had loss of crop production.

Many of these advances in water conservation were made possible because of state research and local control over groundwater issues. When this work is done at the local level, it has the support and cooperation of constituents and maintains the trust and confidence of the local citizenry. This level of local cooperation could be lost if the federal government were to assume the much greater role in groundwater

resources management that S. 212 suggests.

S. 212 contains numerous provisions that move the management of groundwater toward federal jurisdiction. This legislation would require the Secretary of Interior through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to oversee work to characterize, map, model and monitor the High Plains Aquifer. AFBF and the Texas Farm Bureau oppose the federal component and specifically, the establishment of a Federal Review Panel and any requirement of the Secretary of Interior to report to Congress on the High Plains Aquifer.

Each of the eight states that overlie the High Plains Aquifer has for decades, actively mapped, monitored and managed those portions of the aquifer that occur within their respective borders. The collected data continues to be used by state agencies to manage the aquifer on a watershed or other sub-regional basis. The data indicates that water levels of the High Plains Aquifer can vary significantly even within a single watershed. If management strategies must be made to address localized water levels, those strategies can better be developed and implemented by state agencies or local governing bodies. This is a clear example as to why the federal government should not have jurisdiction over groundwater management, including oversight of mapping, modeling or monitoring of the High Plains aquifer.

Within the eight-state region of the High Plains Aquifer 4,800 wells are used annually for observing water levels. One on-going comprehensive study by various state institutions, including Texas A&M University, is being conducted on the aquifer to further assist state agencies in their management of the aquifer. While this study effort uses federal funding, it is not a top down, federally driven groundwater management program. S. 212 has been estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to cost as much as $90 million; additional money that will need to be appropriated in order for the Federal government to duplicate the work of ongoing state research regarding the High Plains Aquifer. That money could be much better spent directly by states to further on-going water conservation programs.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of AFBF and the Texas Farm Bureau regarding our opposition to S. 212. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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